



## IMPROVE SLEEP WITH EXERCISE

### ANOTHER REASON TO ADD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO YOUR DAY: TO IMPROVE SLEEP AT NIGHT.

If you're looking for a way to improve sleep (yours or your child's), look no further than exercise. Every hour that kids are sedentary during the day adds three minutes to the time it takes them to fall asleep at night, according to one study of 500 seven-year-olds.

Adults who are more active also fall asleep more quickly, and you don't need to train excessively to get this powerful benefit. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity. So taking a brisk walk for 30 minutes, five days a week, is sufficient. Research has shown that this amount of exercise improves the quality of your sleep. It lowers your chances of feeling tired and having difficulty concentrating during the day, and cuts your risk of having leg cramps at night, too.

How does exercise work this sleep-improving magic? Physical activity, especially outside in sunlight, can help readjust circadian rhythms. This in turn can improve sleep-wake cycles. This is why exercising outside can also help with jet lag; it's a way to reset your body's clock.

So when should you exercise for maximum sleep improvement? It may not matter much. It's a myth that evening exercise will keep you from falling asleep. If you don't typically exercise and are not fit, aches and pains from late-afternoon or evening workouts might disrupt your sleep, says Dr. Richard Simon, writing for the National Sleep Foundation. But if you're already a regular exerciser, it shouldn't matter what time of day you work out. Just choose the time when you are most likely to actually go out and do it.

There's another way exercise can help improve sleep: weight control. Staying active helps you maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or obese can contribute to sleep problems, and vice versa; lack of sleep can contribute to weight gain.

Finally, if you're an athlete looking to improve performance, more sleep can help you too. Elizabeth Quinn, About's Guide to Sports Medicine, recommends making sleep (including naps, if necessary) a regular priority and adding extra sleep time before a big competition or event.

Article By [Catherine Holecko](#), About.com Guide; Sources: Nixon GM, Thompson JMD, et al. [Falling asleep: the determinants of sleep latency](#). *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 2009; Vol. 24, Issue 9. Loprinzia PD, Cardinal BJ. [Association between objectively-measured physical activity and sleep](#), NHANES 2005-2006. *Mental Health and Physical Activity*, 2011; Vol. 4, Issue 2. The National Sleep Foundation: [Obesity and sleep](#). Accessed June 29, 2012.

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